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was never without friends, never without opportunities, if he could have availed himself of them. It is pleasant to see Mr. Ticknor treating him with that considerate kindness which many a young scholar can remember as shown so generously to himself. But nothing could help Percival, whose nature had defeat worked into its very composition. He was not a real, but an imaginary man. His early attempt at suicide (as Mr. Ward seems to think it) is typical of him. He is not the first young man who, when crossed in love, has spoken of "loupin o'er a linn," nor will he be the last. But that any one who really meant to kill himself should put himself resolutely in the way of being prevented, as Percival did, is hard to believe. Chateaubriand, the arch sentimentalist of these latter days, had the same harmless *velleity* of self-destruction, — enough to scare his sister and so give him a smack of sensation, — but a very different thing from the settled will which would be really perilous. Shakespeare, always true to Nature, makes Hamlet dally with the same exciting fancy. Alas! self is the one thing the sentimentalist never truly wishes to destroy! One remarkable gift Percival seems to have had, which may be called memory of the eye. What he saw he never forgot, and this fitted him for a good geological observer. How great his power of combination was, which alone could have made him a great geologist, we cannot determine. But he seems to have shown but little in other directions. His faculty of acquiring foreign tongues we do not value so highly as Mr. Ward. We have known many otherwise inferior men who possessed it. Indeed, the power to express the same nothing in ten different languages is something to be dreaded rather than admired. It gives a horrible advantage to dulness. The best thing to be learned from Percival's life is that he was happy for the first time when taken away from his vague pursuit of the ideal, and set to practical work.

11. — *Laus Veneris, and other Poems and Ballads.* By ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE. New York: Carleton. pp. 328.

IF it were Mr. Swinburne's desire, in giving this volume to the world, to provoke violent antagonisms, and achieve that notoriety which has its recognized business value, he has certainly succeeded. His career as an author, though so brief, has already reversed all the traditions of literature. Other poets, possessed with a reverent comprehension of their art, would gladly put out of the way the first crude wind-falls which precede the maturer fruit; but he, having gained a respectful hearing by his "Atalanta in Calydon," immediately goes back upon

his tracks, and avenges himself upon the early indifference of the public by reissues of all his previous ventures. The name he has won is used to indorse and give currency to the notes which were not received while he was nameless. "The Queen Mother" and "Rosamond" were so far inferior to "Atalanta in Calydon," that those of the author's admirers who were not aware of their antecedent production were somewhat shaken in their estimate of his genius; and this volume, most of the contents of which, we understand, date from earlier periods, is even less likely to confirm their first favorable impressions.

The circumstances attending its publication, both in England and in this country, have, however, given the book a more than literary significance. The question of the immoral in literature, provoked by Mr. Charles Reade's critics, is reopened under a new phase, and the purely literary quality of Mr. Swinburne's poems has been overlooked in the heat of the discussion. The basis of criticism has been shifted from the artistic ground where it belongs, and the spirit which gave us Petronius Arbitrator is confronted by that which now emasculates our Shakespeare. We think there is no need of calling so many elements into the field: the difficulty admits of a simpler solution. If the volume were no more than a healthy protest against the over-squeamishness of a large class of readers, we should not feel called upon to notice the dispute; but its author daringly challenges judgment on points which involve a higher and more important principle.

In the first place, let us frankly say that we have no sympathy with the nervous delicacy which is always on the lookout for causes of offence. We favor no limitations which would set conventional barriers for the poet, or weaken the masculine fibre of his song. We would not take from him one note in the scale of passion. We admit that, when he would give melodious expression to life, he cannot always omit the undertone of that tremendous instinct upon which all finer energies are based. The natural force of an appetite is not a prohibited motive in Art. But whatever material is carried into the domain of Art must be subordinate to the laws and receive the conditions which she imposes. She is not concerned with fear of defilement, because all things become pure when they correspond to her proportions. The ethical question disappears: Evil cannot follow Beauty to its perfect result in the human brain.

The poet, therefore, who makes use of human appetites and propensities in the construction of a proportioned work, must have attained to the objective vision of the true artist. As the statue represents form, and not flesh, so his use of these materials must suggest simple truths in nature, or in the dramatic conception of a character, and not hint of

realities which either shock or entice, according to the quality of the reader. They must never be allowed to disturb the serene, unimpassioned atmosphere of art.

Imperfectly defined as may be the laws of art in their broadest sense, one law, at least, is firmly fixed, — that all which disgusts is prohibited. Although elements which in themselves inspire the feeling are allowed to take their place in a harmony which masters it, so that even terror may become a part of beauty, yet the attainment of such a harmony is an inflexible condition. Judged by this law, Mr. Swinburne has failed. His apprehension in other directions is so keen, and his scholarship is so apparent, that we cannot suppose him either ignorant of the existence of the law, or a rebel against its eternal authority. We therefore suspect him of a desperate endeavor to overcome the impossible, and make that which is hideous and revolting acceptable by the aid of an unusual rhythmical skill and an astonishing command of all the minor arts of the poet. We are glad that he has failed: we are glad that Art has vindicated her integral purity. With all his skill, the poems in which he has made this attempt breathe a stifling, sickening atmosphere. They represent forms of passion so very abnormal and impure, that the mere contemplation of them seems to smutch and stain. A painter who should devote his genius to the representation of hideous sores would be a fair parallel for the most that Mr. Swinburne could possibly achieve in this line. We might wonder at his realistic truth, but we should turn shuddering away from the canvas. Such poems as these can only corrupt those who are already hopelessly corrupt. But we protest against them as an outrage against the poetical art. It is not enough that Sappho sang in this strain, or that Nero's vices still secretly exist: in his defence on these grounds, Mr. Swinburne avoids the higher questions.

With the exception of some half-dozen poems, this morbid, feverish atmosphere pervades the entire volume. We turn its pages in vain for an utterance of healthy, natural passion: all is convulsion, delirium, excess. What grace and music of metre can make acceptable such lines as

"By the ravenous teeth that have smitten
Through the kisses that blossom and bud,
By the lips intertwined and bitten
Till the foam has a savor of blood"?

We weary at last of the incessant iteration, in poem after poem, of either the mad, diseased devices of flagging and exhausted passion, or the disgust of satiety. If all which the author urges in his defence be true, if our public is prudish and prurient and our literature emascu-

late, for the sake of manhood give us virility, not impotence! If the supremacy of the poet's pure art is to be assailed, let us not blush to behold the quality of the foemen!

We are aware that these poems are dramatic in their character, and we have no right to assume that the phenomena they represent are more attractive to Mr. Swinburne than to us. We arraign him for an artistic fault, in which the whole question of morality is included. The most harm these poems are capable of doing will be in debasing the standard of young authors who may be led captive by their splendid metrical qualities. They are, in form and diction, the culmination of the sensuous school of poetry. In fact, the *form* is so frequently overlaid with a dazzle and glitter of antithetic words, skilful alliterations, startling rhymes, and bold, unusual metaphors, that it almost disappears. The poems appear to be based on *moods*, rather than distinct conceptions. One's ear rings with the vibrations of a melody sustained far beyond the ordinary power of breath, but the residuum in one's mind at the end amounts simply to the fact that the gods are cruel and inexorable, and that love is another and a worse form of hate.

Taking the poems as the author puts them forth, as "my verses, the first-fruits of me," we feel the greater regret that a poet's first-fruits should be experiments in such a direction. Shelley's example should have warned, not encouraged. On the other hand, they display the author's possession of genuine and conspicuous gifts, and the doubt which the remarkable intellectual precocity they exhibit might have engendered is already laid by the better work which first made his name known to us. In our estimate of his powers, therefore, we are not solely guided by these retrospective examples. We are spared the necessity of conjecture, seeing that he has since turned to a chaster Muse.

Turning from those poems where nameless forms of passion are simulated with desperate and convulsive efforts (among which, best in form and worst in spirit, we reckon "*Dolores*") to the few which are unobjectionable, we find a grateful relief in the poems dedicated to Walter Savage Landor and Victor Hugo. We find, nevertheless, in these as in the other poems, that the conception lacks a definite and symmetrical form. It does not unfold, leaf after leaf, from the bud to the perfect flower, but resembles one of those hot-house carnations, where the anthers are cultivated into petals and their bulk splits the calyx. Thus there is a lack of proportion between the extreme richness of the diction and the development of the thought. The latter often threatens to give way under the strain of words chosen for their fire and force. With so many felicities of phrase and of rhythm, there is scarcely a single couplet which clings to the memory when

one has closed the book. We acknowledge the author's wonderful mastery of all the minor tricks and devices of song, we are impressed with a vague sense of power, but we do not feel the presence of a deep and earnest poetic *nature*. The marvellous skill with which the spirit of the miracle-plays is reproduced in "The Masque of Queen Bersabe," and the speech of Ezekiel in "Aholibah," suggests the question whether such power of transformation is compatible with the individuality of genius. Mr. Swinburne's rhythmical gift, however, is indisputably his own; he has a singing tongue, and none of the mannerisms with which these earlier poems abound can obscure the melodies whereto they are set. His "Dedication," one of the best poems in the volume, is a piece of perfect music. In "Dolores," the sweet, flexible undulations of his metre *almost* (and not quite, here, is as fatal as not at all) carry us over the hideously repellent theme. The same may be said of "Hesperia" and the "Sapphics." Perhaps his best poems are the "Ballad of Burdens" and the "Hymn to Proserpine," — the latter a consistent and sustained dramatic lyric. "Faustine," which has excited so much animadversion, is really a much nearer approach to objective art than the author's other ventures in that prohibited field. It fails because the morbid feature of the picture is set barely before the reader's eyes. In the four sonnets entitled "Hermaphroditus," alone, is the element of beauty predominant; and these, judged by the artistic law, may be declared unexceptionable.

Neither the faults nor the merits of this volume are of the ordinary character; but they are shaken together like wine and lees, and not to be easily separated. If "Atalanta in Calydon" had not shown us that the process of clarification has already commenced, we might doubt the character of the future draughts which Mr. Swinburne may offer us. Even now, reading these firstlings by the light of his latest production, we are not able to predict how far he will succeed in emancipating himself from the school of the day. Art has many phases, but no fashions. The higher the poetic conception, the less it needs the adornment of flashing and glittering words. What Mr. Swinburne says of Dolores, "Thou art noble and nude and antique," he might say of the chaste and severe Muse. When he writes from the impulsion of an earnest thought, compelling itself into an artistically symmetrical form, he may find that force is lost by the doubling of adjectives, and expression weakened by the lulling music of alliteration. Mere richness of coloring, like that of Diaz, whose groups of figures at a certain distance resemble bunches of flowers, does not constitute painting; and neither does opulence of language, though scattered with the largesse of perfect metre, constitute poetry. Mr. Swinburne is a poet, and his first

tendency seems to have been to magnify the gifts which he possessed in order to conceal those wherein he is deficient. We would not uncharitably judge this tendency, although his publication of the poems in this stage of his career has the character of a reassertion of the spirit in which they were written. That the publication was a mistake, there can be little doubt; that his genius shall direct itself to the truer and nobler work of which he is capable, is our hope.

12. — *Charles Lamb. A Memoir.* By BARRY CORNWALL. Boston: Roberts Brothers. 1866. 12mo. pp. 304.

It was not to be expected that Mr. Procter's volume would contain much information about Lamb entirely new. Neither much novelty nor much criticism was looked for, but a friendly warmth of recollection, and a genuine appreciation, fit to mingle with the same feelings in the reader. And it is exactly this that the book gives.

We have the old story over again of Lamb's school-days with Cole-ridge at Christ's Hospital, his desk at the India House, his insanity, the dreadful disorder of his sister's mind, and the tragedy of their mother's death. Again we hear of his tender care of his sister, and their journeys from house to house in London, his friends, his tastes, his books, his evenings at the "Salutation and Cat," his pipes of Orinooko; again of his joy at his release from the India House, and again of the weariness which followed it. The facts are the pleasanter because they are old, and the manner is the pleasanter because it is new, — the manner of a kind-hearted old man telling to the new-comers the recollections of his younger days.

Mr. Procter, in his Preface, expresses the hope that "the advocate for modern times will try to admit into the circle of his sympathy" his recollections of Charles Lamb. As to the recollections themselves, we think that no one, whatever times he advocates, will dislike their affectionate tone, or even quarrel with their occasional discursiveness, natural enough to a time of life when tracks of reminiscence are plentiful; and as to the subject of them, is not Lamb more widely read and more generally appreciated by us moderns than by the generation for which the *Elia* Essays were written? Indeed, in his constant simplicity, in his love of natural art, in his love of his kind, he was himself an advocate for modern times. It is true that he enjoyed things out of date, and had a taste for fashions gone by, yet it was a taste that did not lead him to the desert of stunting pedantry, but to older gardens, whose rich soil he knew, but saw neglected. A taste which made